

GLC 63
CAMERON

WRITINGS

ON HEALTH AND MEDICAL TREATMENT

[10 pages]
[19--]

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on health & medical treatment

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began
I have a hidden disability that ~~to~~ ^{began} impact my daily living activities in 1989, and dramatically changed my life 1996. I'm still in the process of acceptance. Unfortunately I am now in a painstaking process that has been ongoing for almost two years. The specialists have been unable, thus far, to arrive at a diagnosis for the mysterious ailment that has dominated my life. We thought we had nailed it with a very rare disease which fit my symptomatology to a tee. But the expert on the disease said no. Now I have another specialist and the saga continues. My hidden disability requires that I see my physician every month. The yet undiagnosed illness sends me to the emergency room several times a month. I have a great deal of experience dealing with physicians, nurses, submitting to many diagnostic tests and all the while I have a great mistrust of the medical establishment. My very thick chart which resides with my primary physician does not contain this aspect of my health, my anxiety when dealing with all the different specialists, their assistants nor the deep mistrust of health providers that is part of my inheritance as a Native American.

I grew up on a reservation in South Dakota. Our health concerns, problems were addressed by the Public Health Service, also known as the Indian Health Service or IHS. Through most of my childhood, the only hospital and health care center was located in the town of our tribal headquarters in North Dakota. A long drive, over one hour, if any member of my family had a medical emergency. Unfortunately it happened twice; my grandmother had a severe gallbladder attack in the middle of the night. The second time occurred when the new heater in my grandparents house exploded one late autumn night. My grandfather died from third degree burns after his heroic effort to stay alive. In both situations, transportation to the hospital was by automobile, not in an ambulance with the attending care of paramedics. In a family situation involving an ambulance, my mom was being transported via ambulance off reservation to the white hospital due to complications in labor. On the way to the hospital, the ambulance broke down on a country road not well traveled, one of the short-cut roads often found in rural areas. Residents of my mom's rez had been demanding that the IHS (Indian Health Service) the old and unreliable ambulance. My brother Russell who was being delivered suffered permanent nerve damage to his left arm. Following years of counseling, he is still struggling with acceptance of his disability. The Indian Health Service finally purchased a new ambulance.

Native Americans have a unique relationship with this country's institutions. The history of Native American health care certainly informs my belief about the medical world. Spreading disease during the colonization of my country was one tool the US government employed to achieve genocide of our people. Smallpox laden blankets were distributed as a military tactic. The introduction of alcohol is the direct cause of many diseases, including fetal alcohol syndrome and deaths due to traffic accidents. These accidents often claim our youth. I believed that I would die as a teen passenger in a car driven by a drunk friend.

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genocide of our people. Small-pox laden blankets were distributed as a military tactic. The introduction of alcohol is the direct cause of many diseases, including fetal alcohol syndrome ~~and~~ deaths due to traffic accidents. These accidents often claim our youth. As I was growing up, ~~someone in the back of my mind~~ I believed I would die as a teen passenger in a car driven by a drunk friend. ~~I had already experienced many deaths of young people due to alcohol-related accidents.~~

I listened to many stories of people on the rez who received inadequate and in some cases unsafe health care after waiting many hours at the one health care center for the entire reservation. We knew which doctors disliked, perhaps even hated us and passed this information along. Sometimes individuals would remain in a state of ill health to avoid ~~treat~~ treatment from the Indian Health Service. I found all of it to be scary and ~~uncomprehensible~~ incomprehensible.

→ I was raised primarily by my grandparents which is not unusual in a traditional Lakota culture. From my birth until I entered school, my grandparents made the decision to have ~~the white doctor~~ a private doctor, off reservation, to serve as my physician.

The decision was major because it meant that we traveled off reservation into the neighboring white town. In the late 1950's, racism in South Dakota was extremely severe and ~~could~~ could be unsafe for us in the white town. The decision also meant that my grandparents paid for my health care for five years including several weeks of ~~hospital~~ hospitalization when I

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Director of our people. I was for the plan

was decided as a military tactic. The intention

of alcohol is the best case of many others.

including that of the 1918-19 influenza pandemic.

occurred. There was a large number of deaths

As I was coming up to the top of the mountain

I believed I would see a large number of

in a few days as a large number of

already reported cases of the disease

and the number of deaths

I believed to have seen of people in the

who received medical treatment in the hospital

Our other medical treatment in the hospital

Given to the other patients. We have seen

clinical - patients who had no other symptoms

of the disease. I believe that the

of it will be more than sufficient to

Health Service. I believe that it is

and the number of deaths

I was very much surprised to find

not only in a small number of

but also in a large number of

patients to have these symptoms

character of the disease. I believe

The decision was made because it was

travelled to the hospital in the

town. In the late 1920s, the

was extremely severe and could be

to be a very serious disease. The

means that the government paid for

health care for the years including

weeks of hospitalization when I

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Became very ill. My grandparents were not well-off but did have a ranch that they worked very hard to make successful. Thus it was significant for them to pay for my doctor and dental visits. Once I entered the school system, I had no choice but to become involved with the dreaded Indian Health Service.

In the 1970s, a report released by the General Accounting Office found that 3,406 sterilizations were performed on Native women by The Indian Health Service in 4 regions. 3,001 sterilizations were performed on women less than 44 years of age. Not only did the IHS encourage Native women to be

sterilized, they also conducted medical experiments on nonconsenting patients. The sterilizations were scandalous; the consent forms offered to the women before the operations did not meet Federal requirements.

Essentially, the sterilizations were performed without consent.

The possibility of my developing a small trust of medical personnel was wiped out when I learned about the sterilizations.

When I first moved to San Francisco, I did not

find a physician. Whenever I needed medical

care, I used one of the health clinics or forced myself to utilize the Indian Health Service in San Francisco. Coming out to the health care provider

was a new anxiety I had not anticipated. The inevitable

which kind of birth control question made

my heart race a little faster. Recently when the

emergency room doc inquired about which birth control,

I said I have a domestic partner. So he said no

sex in the last several months. Even in my extremely

which he wrote on my chart.

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uncomfortable physical condition, it was maddening and also silly because I wanted him to know that indeed I had sex in the past several months. So I pointed at Linda and ~~restated my husband's statement~~ restated that I have a domestic partner; he then looked at us anew saying oh okay I get it. Since I am in the emergency ^{department} so often to get ~~stabilized~~ stabilized, I'm learning the personalities of the various personnel. The homophobic nurse ~~is~~ finds ways to express it. She ~~stopped~~ ^{stopped} Linda at the entrance into the care area with a hand blocking Linda's face explaining that it was very crowded. When I arrived at the bay, I found one patient and ~~three~~ ^{three} empty beds. Within one minute of not allowing Linda entrance, she cheerfully allowed in the ~~husband~~ son-in-law of the other patient ~~in the Bay~~. I summoned the Charge Nurse and ~~was able to get Linda~~ ^{was at my} ~~beside~~ ^{beside} quickly. I also experience invisibility as a Native American in ~~the ER~~. Under racial identification, we discovered that I am checked off as white. Usually I am mistaken for Spanish, South American or Central American. Perhaps a small matter when considering ~~me~~ ^{that} I am sick enough to be in the emergency room, ^{identity} but it takes a little chunk of my integrity ^{and} creates ~~relevant~~ additional anxiety at a time when I need peace.

I am very, very fortunate to have health insurance and I am fortunate to have options other than the Indian Health Service from the 1960's and 1970's. But it does not mean

uncomfortable physical condition. It was not long
also silly because I wanted him to know that I
I had sex in the past several months. So I pointed
at Linda and ~~the other woman~~ ~~restated~~ that
I have a domestic partner, the husband of my sister
saying oh okay I got the message

Since I am in the company of the girl
stabilized, I'm learning the possibilities of the
various personnel. The geographic area of the
Ways to express it. The

stopped

distance into the one area of a local building
I had for explaining that it was very crowded
When I arrived at the house I found the patient
and

three

not allowed back outside. The chair had
in the window the view of the other
in the house. I

Went to work
privately.

I do not have a lot of friends
in the house. I have a lot of friends
disappeared and I was checked off the list.
I have a lot of friends for a long time
American of course. I have a lot of friends
I will never know. I have a lot of friends
I will never know. I have a lot of friends

But it takes a little time of my life. I have
I have a lot of friends. I have a lot of friends
I have a lot of friends. I have a lot of friends

I am very very fortunate to have health
insurance and I am fortunate to have options
other than the system. Health care from the
1970s and 1980s. But it does not mean

that my medical encounters are smooth and perfect. It does not mean that the doctors and nurses whose jobs ~~are~~ are to make me well and comfortable, ~~and~~ are ~~incompetent~~ able to disguise ~~disguising~~ their biases ^{and} prejudices.

My favorite encounter in the emergency room occurred at ~~a~~ a time when I was ~~in~~ in such disharmony with the universe. I had a grand mal seizure on a ~~park~~ street in early evening. It was ~~so~~ so very frightening because I was unable to answer questions from the paramedics as they revived me. My mind was essentially blank ~~and~~ I could only see one word which was orayon. Fortunately ~~my domestic partner~~ Linda was waiting at our car where we were supposed to meet. From the car she could see the ambulance, ~~and~~ fire engine and a crowd of people. She instinctively knew that something had happened to me. When she came running up the street with our dog, I ~~thinks~~ somehow knew that I was supposed to know her. But ~~there~~ the ability to recall her name and our dog's name was absent even with our dog licking my face. For some odd reason I clutched my keys which are attached to a beaded key chain. When the ambulance arrived at UCSF, I saw that my attending physician was wearing a beaded stethoscope with the same colors and design as my beaded keychain. We noticed each other's beadwork simultaneously. And the best part was yet to come. He spoke to me in Lakota and suddenly my ability to

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comprehend words returned. My attending physician was a Lakota from the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota and he was also a Sun dancer which is one of the highest roads ^{for a Lakota} to embark upon. at a time of disharmony, the creator gave me a gift of harmony. One medical experience I will not forget and one that I recall when I am having an especially rough time with doctors and nurses.

As Native and lesbian I ~~feel~~ strongly identify as an outsider to health care although I see ~~someone~~ a doctor at least once a week.

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comprehensively well covered. The climate is
and a lake from the last glaciation in
South Dakota and is now also a lake. It is
is one of the highest lakes in the world.
at a time of disturbance, the climate
there was a gift of ice. One million
years ago I was not there, and the lake
I know when I was there was something
more than just a lake and water.

As native and Indian I know
strongly identify as an Indian.
Health and strength I know
at least the same.

Look at me, I am not a separate woman.

There is something soothing and calm about green and blue. I become ready, I put on these clothes, I sit I wait I walk around I think about football I talk to Linda about some of my favorite memories with my grandmother. I move my head from side to side, releasing tension. I whisper to our fathers. In time of need, I ~~presort~~ resort to the Catholics and then I ask tunkasila But I have to find comfort and safety. They exist in the clean gowns of either blue or green.

The nurse comes to take my blood pressure, my arm feels like it will burst. Does ever happen? Someone's arm exploding. I think this is an absurd thought. Do I dare ask the nurse.

Bits and pieces I say to Linda. This was a song by the Dave Clark 5. It was popular when I was a child. Bits and pieces I say to Linda. This is what is happening to me.

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Bits and pieces of me taken away, taken out. I want to resist this, the scalpel the needle in my one good vein. My body is familiar with blue and green and the absolute thud of going under.

My doctor will make me whole again, will heal me by taking something away from me, a part of my body, parts of my body,

I blame my mother. Her body suffers too. I watch her from San Francisco I dream about her at night. She holds my hand.

The wait is two hours. Sometimes the doctor's office calls me to say Can you come in earlier. They are ahead of schedule in surgery. I can't do that. I need those two hours to get ready, to face my fear, to think about my life.

The blue and green gowns are piled waiting for me.

I can only hope that this surgery is the final one but I check off in my mind, the bits and pieces missing from my family.

my grandmothers gall bladder

~~my grandfather~~

Aunt Margaret's breast

Most of Brothers and sisters' appendix

I have to make

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